

Recalls

• **CARS**—Ford Motor Co. announced the recall of about 741,000 1976 and 1977 standard size Fords and Mercurys and 1977 Lincolns that may have a safety defect in the engine cooling fan assemblies.

The cars are equipped with "flex-fans" for cooling the engine and have curved, flexible blades that bend backward and flatten out as engine speed increases. The constant flexing may cause the blades to crack and break off, damaging other engine parts and posing a particular danger to someone repairing the car when the break occurs.

Ford dealers will replace the assemblies at no cost to owners when the necessary parts are available. [See CONSUMER NEWS: June 15]

• **General Motors Corp. (GM)** has announced the recall of about 32,000 late 1977 and 1978-model cars to check for a flaw in the rear axle shafts that might cause the shafts to break and the wheel to fall off.

(Continued on page 2)

S-p-r-e-a-d-i-n-g the word

"The Low-Income Consumer: An Action Agenda" is the theme of the Nov. 4-6 National Conference on Consumer Protection in Washington, DC. The conference, which is co-sponsored by the **Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA)**, expects to (1) confront the abuses suffered by the poor and minority consumer and (2) develop and implement an action agenda for reform in areas of housing, credit and redlining, utilities and energy, food and health. Registration fee of \$10 includes a Nov. 5 banquet. For more information write or call James Brennan, United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, 297 Park Ave., S., New York, NY 10010; telephone 212-475-2121, ext. 206.

Consumer News

Government Printing Office (GPO) has informed us that as of Dec. 1 the subscription price for CONSUMER NEWS will be increased from \$4.00 to \$6.00 per year because of increased costs for printing, binding and computer charges for mail list startup costs, updates, renewals and address changes. New subscriptions received before Dec. 1, however, will be accepted at the old \$4.00 rate. We regret the necessity for this increase, and remind readers that CONSUMER NEWS has been sold at the \$4.00 subscription rate since January 1974. We believe CONSUMER NEWS is still a bargain.

consumer news

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
Office of Consumer Affairs

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New Energy Dept. established

On Oct. 1, the **Energy Dept.** became the 12th Cabinet-level agency in the Federal Government. Public Law 95-91, authorizing the agency, was signed by President Carter on Aug. 4.

The new department, designed to provide the framework for carrying out national energy policy, will bring together the many energy programs and offices created over the years within the Federal Government.

All the powers previously held by the **Federal Power Commission (FPC)**, the **Federal Energy Administration (FEA)**, and the **Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA)** have been transferred to Energy. Conservation, resource development and production, research and development, data management, environment and regulation, are major programs in the new department.

Energy will also have control over a number of energy programs previously lodged in **Interior, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Transportation, Defense, and Commerce Depts.** There will also be a 5-member, independent **Federal Energy Regulatory Commission** within the Energy Dept. to shield pricing of natural gas, oil, and electricity from political pressure.

Energy's consumer affairs functions will be managed by the Assistant Secretary for Intergovernmental and Institutional Relations. The office is supposed to ensure that individuals and groups outside of Energy are heard, responded to, and appropriately involved in decisionmaking.

Auto hotline: Here to stay

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has decided that its experimental Auto Safety Hotline should be made permanent. CONSUMER NEWS is again reporting its availability because, according to NHTSA, "too many motorists are still unaware of this toll-free facility which can be used, day or night, to report vehicle safety problems and obtain vehicle recall information."

The Hotline began its experiment in a 10-state area 2 years ago, and in July 1976 its services were expanded to all states except Hawaii and Alaska. On a normal workday Hotline operators handle 150-200 calls; when a major recall or safety investigation is announced, the operators receive about 500 calls a day. The Hotline operators can also tell you whether your car or one you are thinking about buying—new or used—has ever been recalled. However, before calling, be sure you have the following information available: Year, make and model of car and its vehicle identification number. If you are reporting a safety problem, be prepared to describe the problem and report odometer mileage.

Hotline operators are on duty from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Eastern time, Monday through Friday. Calls made at other times are recorded, and operators return the calls during normal work hours. The toll-free number is 800-424-9393. District of Columbia, Hawaiian and Alaskan residents should call 202-426-0123. For District residents it's a local call—Hawaiians and Alaskans have to pay the long distance charges for the time being.

Recalls (Continued from page 1)

The recall involves Chevrolet Nova, Pontiac Ventura and Phoenix, Oldsmobile Omega and Buick Skylark models.

• **CARS AND TRUCKS**—Ford Motor Co., has announced the recall of 16,000 cars and trucks because of a possible carburetor problem that causes the throttle to stick in a wide-open position.

The recall involves certain 1978-model Ford, Mercury, Lincoln and Mark V passenger cars, and 1977 and 1978 Econoline vans, van-like club wagons, and light trucks. All are equipped with 460-cubic inch engines and 4 barrel carburetors, and were built between July 5 and Sept. 9 of this year.

Drivers of these vehicles are advised to avoid wide-open throttle applications, such as used in passing, until the defect is corrected.

• **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)** has announced the recall of 134,605 1970-1972 Toyota Corona and Corona Mark II's with automatic transmissions because a faulty switch in the transmission lever could cause a fire. Toyota Motor Sales USA, Inc., has ordered the necessary parts to replace all the neutral safety switches in the cars, and owners will receive letters from Toyota notifying them of the recall.

NHTSA suggests that owners of the 1970-1972 Corona and Corona Mark II's be especially alert to any burning odors or smoke coming from the vicinity of the transmission console.

• **PRODUCTS FOR THE BLIND**—Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) announces the recall of 12 products intended for use by blind children because of excessive lead content in their paint.

The recall is being made in cooperation with the Kentucky Department of Human Resources and the American Printing House for the Blind, Louisville, KY, which produced and distributed the products. These products are not normally found on retail shelves, but are sold by mail order to consumers, school systems, and government agencies.

The recalled products are: 1-0301 Biological Models; 1-0332 Land Forms; 1-0340 Mitchell Form Sets; 1-0357 Sports Field Kit; 1-0371 Shape Board; 1-0382 Textured Blocks; 1-0372 Puzzle Form Board Kit; 1-0872 Sound Matching Board II; 1-0108 Large US Map; 1-0109 Small US Map; 1-0329 Fractional Parts; 1-0359 Stokes Place Holder.

Persons with these products should return them to the place of purchase for a replacement or full refund.

Coffee prices vs. other drinks

Although coffee prices are a little lower now than when CONSUMER NEWS [Feb. 1] reported on the state of the world's coffee production, the under-a-dollar pound of coffee of just 2 years ago has passed into history, according to *Consumer Views*, a publication of Citibank of New York.

The following table is reproduced with the permission of *Consumer Views*. In addition to the popular beverages listed below, there are "uncoffees," made either at home or store-bought, which contain products such as barley, wheat and other cereals, and soybeans. They cost about a penny a cup.

COFFEE—THE COST PER CUP *

Type	One pound (in dollars)	6-oz. cup (in cents)
Regular	3.49-4.69	9-12
Decaffeinated	4.49-4.99	11-12
Instant regular	8.52-9.85	4
6-oz.-3.19-3.69		
Freeze-dried	11.58-11.78	5
8 oz., 5.79-5.89		
Instant decaffeinated	11.58	5
8 oz., 5.79		
Freeze-dried	13.16	6
4 oz., 3.29		
Coffee beans	3.49-4.98	6-8
Espresso regular	5.71	10
12 oz., 4.29		
Espresso instant	14.32	6
2 oz., 1.79		

*Costs per cup are based on the following yields per pound: Regular or decaffeinated preground, 40 cups; instant and freeze-dried, 240; coffee beans and espresso, 60.

WHAT THE OTHER DRINKS COST*

Product	As bought (in dollars)	6-oz. serving (in cents)
TEA (popular blends)		
Bags (100)-8 oz.	1.99	2
Loose, to steep-16 oz.	2.29	1
Loose (for automatic makers)-12 oz	1.34	1
Canned iced (6-pack) 12-oz. cans	1.49	12
Instant-4 oz.	1.65	1
COCOA		
Instant mix-14 oz.	1.49	10
ORANGE JUICE		
Frozen concentrate 12-oz. can	0.85	11
Refrigerated quart	0.53	10

*Prices in New York area supermarkets in August 1977. Costs per serving rounded to nearest penny.

Home insulation: Insulate yourself from fraud

With energy costs high and another frigid winter expected, many consumers are insulating or re-insulating their homes. As previously reported in *Consumer News*, the Council of Better Business Bureaus (CBBB) has published a booklet—available from many local Better Business Bureaus—on insulation and prepurchase considerations. [See *CONSUMER NEWS* Sept. 15.] And, the **Consumer Product Safety Commission** (CPSC) and the **Federal Trade Commission** (FTC) have compiled the following information in hopes of better informing consumers before they purchase insulation or hire a contractor.

Three basic types of insulation are most commonly used. All are good if properly manufactured and installed. They are:

- Mineral wool including rock wool and fibrous glass. Both of these products can be blown in place or purchased in blankets or batts with a vapor barrier. (Vapor barriers are sheets of coated or laminated paper, aluminum foil or plastic film covering the side of the insulation facing the living space. They are installed to prevent moisture inside a building from passing through walls and ceilings, condensing and wetting the insulation.)

- Plastic foam/resin (made of polystyrene, polyurethane, or urea formaldehyde) can be purchased in pre-formed sheets or bolts, or foamed in place by a contractor. Foam insulation can vary considerably in its final properties depending on the operator's skill, how various components are mixed, and the time allowed for "curing."

- Cellulosic insulation, made of any finely ground cellulose product such as recycled newspaper, can be poured or blown in place.

FLAMMABILITY

An important performance characteristic to evaluate is flammability. Acceptable standards for insulation have been established by the American Society of Testing and Materials (ASTM). Although many manufacturers' insulation products meet ASTM standards, the "acceptable" product may still be flammable and should not be installed near heat.

While mineral wools themselves pose no flammability problem, some of their paper vapor barriers are flammable. Since cellulose is inherently flammable, flame-retardant chemicals are usually added to cellulosic insulation to reduce flammability to acceptable levels. However, the addition of such chemicals can reduce the thermal resistance of insulation. Thermal resistance is the ability of insulation to resist winter heat loss and summer heat gain. And, if too many sulfate chemicals have been added, pipes and other metal items may become corroded.

If properly manufactured and installed, urea

formaldehyde products can meet accepted levels for flammability safety, but they are not "fire proof" as distributors sometimes claim. Polyurethane and polystyrene are offered both in "flame-resistant" and nontreated rigid forms. Non-flame-proofed products are obviously a fire hazard, but the flame-proofed products may also pose a risk. Once the relatively high ignition temperature is reached, these products emit high levels of smoke and toxic gases which can be just as lethal as fire.

Consumers who choose a polyurethane or polystyrene product should know they cannot be used safely unless enclosed in a flame and heat-retardant structure, such as gypsum board. This is true to a lesser degree for mineral wool, cellulose, and urea formaldehyde insulation products.

Another possible hazard linked with urea formaldehyde insulation is emission of toxic fumes after the product has been installed. Improper mixing and curing of this material can contribute to production of such toxic fumes.

Recently, questions have been raised about the cancer-causing potential of fibers inhaled from fibrous glass insulation. While CPSC currently has no evidence that this can cause cancer in humans, it is continuing to review ongoing studies to determine if some type of regulation may be needed.

CAVEAT EMPTOR

FTC warns that deception of consumers is most likely to occur in: (1) claims about a product's flammability—either by misrepresentation or by no reference to its unacceptable flammability; and (2) claims about the product's thermal resistance—either through generalizations without providing "R" values or exaggerations of the "R" values. An "R" value is a number indicating how much resistance a given insulation material presents to heat flowing through it. Generally, the higher the "R" value, the more effective the insulation. Consumers should pay more only for a *higher* "R" value.

To help the consumer guard against dishonest contractors or salespeople who overstate the "R" value of an insulation product, the following outline gives the generally accepted maximum "R" values per square inch of insulation for the most commonly used insulating materials:

PRODUCT	MAXIMUM "R" VALUE
Mineral wool batts and blankets	3.1
Cellulose loose fill	3.1-3.7
Urea formaldehyde	4.1
Polystyrene	6.25
Polyurethane	6.25
Perlite	2.7
Aluminum foil	2.0

(Continued on back page)

Insulation (Continued from page 3)

Any claim of an "R" value above the maximum values given for each material should be highly suspect.

To guard against careless or incompetent installation, which could result in a major reduction in "R" value, choose a reputable contractor. CPSC suggests that you:

- Ask your gas or electric utility company about contractors, consult friends and neighbors, or look in the Yellow Pages under "Insulation Contractors."
- Obtain cost estimates from at least 3 different contractors. Make sure you describe the job identically to each. Remember, you are talking about quality as well as price.
- Check a contractor's reliability with your local Better Business Bureau listed in the phone book, or with your state or local consumer affairs office.
- Ask a contractor for references, including previous customers. Check them out.
- If your state requires licensing, find out if the contractor is licensed. If the state requires bonding, make certain the contractor is bonded.
- Check with your local building-code authorities for guidance in purchasing insulation. Consumers would be well advised to purchase insulation at least as good as that required for new homes under local building codes.
- Talk with a contractor in terms of "R" values. If a contractor won't deal with you in "R" value language, don't deal with him.
- Note the "R" values and coverage figures marked on bags of insulation to be used. Although

these figures may vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, the coverage figure will give you a rough idea of how many bags a contractor will need.

• After selecting a contractor, have a specific contract drawn up for the job, and sign it only when you are fully satisfied that it details everything you want done. You might also have any completed work examined by a municipal building inspector whose certification of satisfactory work will release your final payment.

• Make sure any warranty for the insulation is in writing and part of the contract. Seek a warranty giving enough time after installation to judge whether the insulation has, in fact, reduced your home energy costs.

If you suspect deception or fraud or are having a problem with nonfulfillment of a contract, write or call the Director, Bureau of Consumer Protection, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC 20580; phone 202-523-3727. For a problem involving the failure of a seller to honor a warranty, contact the Division of Special Statutes, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC 20580; phone 202-724-1100. Or you may contact the FTC regional office nearest you. They are listed in the phone book under "US Government, Federal Trade Commission."

DO IT YOURSELF ADVICE

CPSC advises those wishing to do their own installation to wear protective clothing including a disposable respirator marked for "dust" to avoid breathing small fibers, avoid direct contact with insulation dust because flame-retardant chemicals may be absorbed through the skin, and avoid placing insulation near electrical light fixtures or other heat sources. Extreme heat—even without a flame—can ignite some insulation.

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